

STUDY GUIDE

A Thousand Splendid Suns



By Ursula Rani Sarma

Based on the book by Khaled Hosseini

A co-production with the Arts Club Theatre Company

Directed by Haysam Kadri

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18 – 11 2020



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A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

STUDY GUIDE

Created & Compiled by Sarah Farrant

With Contributions From:
Jenna Turk, Artistic Associate, Theatre Calgary
Simon Hodgson & Shannon Stockwell, American Conservatory Theatre

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THE CREATORS OF A *THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS*

By Sarah Farrant

Khaled Hosseini – Source Material Author



Photo: © UNHCR Brian Sokol

Khaleed Hosseini is the award-winning author of the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Hosseini began to write stories as early as seven years old. Hosseini was born in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1965. He lived through what he describes as the “final few years of what is now a forgotten era.” Hosseini has “happy and cheerful recollections” of a childhood in Afghanistan that revolved around spending time with a large extended family. His mother taught Farsi and history at a local high school and his father was a diplomat in the Afghan Foreign Ministry. In 1976, his father was assigned to a diplomatic post at the embassy in Paris so the family was relocated there. They intended to return to Kabul four years later in 1980, but decided against it due to turmoil in their homeland, specifically a communist coup and the invasion of the Soviet Army. The family instead resettled in San Jose, California, after being granted political asylum by the United States. Hosseini graduated from Santa Clara University with a Bachelor’s Degree in Biology in 1988 and then earned a medical degree from University of California’s School of Medicine in 1993. While practicing medicine he began writing his first novel, *The Kite Runner*, which was published in 2003 by Riverhead Books, and turned into a feature film in 2007. Hosseini did not intend on retiring from medicine; however, he found the demands of practicing full time while writing much too heavy and directed his time and efforts into writing *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, *And the Mountains Echoed*, and *Sea Prayer*. It was a trip Hosseini made to Kabul in the spring of 2003, after being away from the country for twenty-seven years, which inspired *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. There, he met and listened to the women’s stories and translated their collective spirit into a book reflecting the inner lives of Afghan women. Hosseini was appointed a Goodwill Ambassador for UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, in 2006. It was a trip he made to Afghanistan with the UNHCR that compelled him to establish The Khaled Hosseini Foundation, which offers humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan focusing on human rights, health care, education, and livelihood. In recognition of these initiatives, he was the recipient of the 2017 James C. Morgan Global Humanitarian Award. He currently resides in Northern California with his wife and two teenagers. He believes he has “told [his] life story in some version through the characters in [his] books.”

Ursula Rani Sarma – Playwright & Adaptor

Ursula Rani Sarma adapted the bestselling novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaleed Hosseini into a stage play by the same name. Ursula Rani Sarma is an Irish-Indian scriptwriter and executive producer for the stage and screen. She fell in love with the theatre while attending UCC and admits to spending more time writing and directing plays than studying. Her plays were first produced while she was attending university in Cork. She co-founded Dijnn Theatre Company along with Kate Neville in 1999 based on the belief that new writing is central to contemporary theatre. That same year, her play *Touched* was performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The success of that production resulted in several commissions with theatre companies, including the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, the National Theatre in London, and the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. Sarma has also held writer-in-residence positions for the National Theatre, the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Centre, and Paines Plough. These credits have established her as an internationally acclaimed writer. A few years later, she transitioned into screenwriting and has since worked with both mediums. Sarma is also the course leader of the masters in scriptwriting at Bath Spa University. She has received numerous awards but considers her three children her greatest achievement. Sarma currently lives with them and her husband in London, UK.



Photo: Helen Warner

AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT URSULA RANI SARMA & NOVELIST KHALED HOSSEINI

*This interview has been edited from its original form, *The Universe of the Human Spirit* by Simon Hodgson & Shannon Stockwell, as it first appeared in American Conservatory Theater's performance program in 2017.*

Strong women dominate the work of award-winning playwright, poet, and screenwriter Ursula Rani Sarma. So it is no surprise that she was drawn to the story of Mariam and Laila, the two women at the center of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. It is Khaled Hosseini's second of his three novels, the other two being *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) and *The Kite Runner* (2003). Hosseini was inspired to write *A Thousand Splendid Suns* after visiting Afghanistan and speaking with the strong women who live in a country where their rights are often oppressed.

Simon Hodgson and Shannon Stockwell spoke with Sarma and Hosseini about their experience working on this adaptation.

Why is *A Thousand Splendid Suns* particularly suited for the stage?

URSULA RANI SARMA: The theatre is one of the best mediums to explore complex human relationships like the ones at the center of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Like the novel, it is the relationship between Mariam and Laila – trapped in a violent home, reaching out to each other – that forms the spine of the play. The difference is that on the stage, the characters will take on a three-dimensional existence while an audience bears witness to their extraordinary journey.

KHALED HOSSEINI: I think there's a sense of immediacy in theatre, which simply can't be created elsewhere. On the right night and at the right performance and with the right crowd, the room is permeated with something that's really tangible – very difficult to describe, but very powerful. There's a collective experience that you have with an audience in the theatre that is difficult to create anywhere else. And by contrast, I think reading a book is a solitary experience.

What kind of conversations have you had with each other throughout the process?

URS: I spoke with Khaled early on in the process, as it was important to hear his hopes for the adaptation and any specific elements that he felt should be retained. Right from the beginning Khaled was very supportive and generous and he encouraged me to follow my instincts and do whatever I felt was right. This was hugely liberating and

meant that I had the freedom to get beneath the skin of the novel and to make the story feel as though it were my own; something that had to happen for me to breathe life into these characters.

KH: As an author, if you're allowing your work to be adapted into another art form by somebody else, you should divorce yourself from the idea that anything you said or wrote is going to appear in the other format. It's far more interesting to get a peek into somebody else's interpretation of your work.

What is this play about?

URS: It's about the immense strength and endurance of women and how they can survive tremendous suffering to keep those they love alive. It is also about how, even in the darkest of times and places, love can grow and sustain the human spirit beyond all pain and hardship. It's about friendship and loyalty, courage and selflessness, grief and violence.

Why is this story important to tell today?

KH: I think a story like *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can remind people that every person under a veil, every refugee walking across plains – every single one of those people has a universe inside them, a life, an entire history, and a long, long history of things that they wanted, of hopes that they had. I think that's important to understand: You can't just categorize people under self-serving umbrellas. These are individual human beings. I think that's what any art form, be it theatre or novels or movies, can do; they can bridge that gap and transport you into the shoes of somebody else. And through that experience, you begin to view the group in a richer way.

WHO'S WHO

By Jenna Turk, Artistic Associate, Theatre Calgary

(in order of appearance)

Babi: Laila's father, in his forties

Laila: 14 years-old at the beginning of the play, daughter to Babi and Fariba; beautiful

Fariba: Laila's mother, 40 years-old, broken-hearted

Rasheed: Mariam's husband, a shoemaker

Mariam: She appears both as a young girl and in her mid-thirties as the worn out, wife to Rasheed

Abdul Sharif: A man posing as a business man to trick Laila.

Tariq: 17 years-old at the beginning of the play, a family friend of Laila's with a prosthetic leg

Mullah Faizullah: A man in his 50's, Mariam's teacher

Nana: Mariam's mother

Jalil: Mariam's father, a wealthy man

Wakil: A man at the Lahore bus station that Laila asks for help

Interrogator: A man questioning Laila and Mariam

Aziza: Laila's daughter (her first-born child), appears as a baby, at 9 years-old, and at 12 years-old

Doctor: She delivers Zalmai

Zalmai: Laila's son, 5 years-old

Zaman: He runs the orphanage/school that Aziza attends

Talib: A member of the Taliban

THE STORY

By Jenna Turk, Artistic Associate, Theatre Calgary

Based on the bestselling novel by the author of *The Kite Runner*, this hauntingly beautiful story reveals the strength of the human spirit. In war-torn Afghanistan, two women are brought together by fate and cruelty. Together they will forge an unlikely friendship that leads to an act of unbreakable love.

A Synopsis

Set in Afghanistan, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* follows the journey of young Laila from 1992 to 1999. Orphaned at fourteen when her parents are killed by a bomb in Kabul, Laila is taken in by a neighbor, Rasheed, and his wife Mariam. But Mariam isn't terribly excited at the prospect of Rasheed taking on a second wife, especially one so young. Nonetheless, Rasheed marries Laila. Unfortunately, as time passes Rasheed reveals himself to be a violent, angry man who takes out his frustrations on the two women.

Laila gives birth to a daughter, Aziza, who is then shunned by Rasheed (for he wanted a son), and Laila and Mariam begin to care for the girl together. They try to escape, but are deceived by a stranger at the bus station and are forced to return home and face the wrath of Rasheed.

Time passes and Laila gives birth again, this time to a son, Zalmai. While he is cherished by his father, the rest of his family suffers. The Taliban are in power and living conditions have worsened, so Aziza is sent away to school under the guise that she is an orphan. A childhood friend, Tariq, returns to find Laila, and it is revealed that they were in fact lovers: Aziza is not Rasheed's child, but Tariq's. Enraged, Rasheed lashes out at Laila, and Mariam steps in, but Rasheed is intent on killing Laila. Desperate to save her, Mariam grabs a shovel and kills him.

Laila and the children flee to start a new life with Tariq while Mariam remains, sacrificing herself, as she knows someone must pay for Rasheed's death. In the end, the bond Laila and Mariam share is an inspiring example of the power of love.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

By Sarah Farrant

The main storyline of the play is set in Kabul, the capital and largest city of Afghanistan, from 1992 to the early 2000s, though there are flashbacks to as early as 1974. In 1974, Afghanistan was a country of peace and prosperity. There is a stark contrast between Mariam's ability to travel on her own as a young lady to Jalil's house in 1974, and the insufferable limitations imposed upon women by the end of the play.

Afghanistan had been at war against the Soviets since 1978. During that conflict, as Rasheed accurately states, about one million people were killed. While some families fled seeking refuge, others remained, joining the rebellion. The groups who fought the communist monarchy came together becoming known as the Mujahadeen, meaning soldiers who make *jihad*, or resistance. Laila's brothers were among those who joined the army in fighting against the Soviet troops. In 1989, the Soviet troops were forced to withdraw due to the increasing presence of the Mujahadeen. When justifying to Mariam his insistence upon taking Laila as a second wife—a common practice in Muslim countries—, Rasheed exclaims, “A young girl like that needs proper protection, especially the way the country is now that the Soviets have left, there are violent, reckless men roaming the streets...” The Mujahadeen are the “violent, reckless men roaming the streets” to which Rasheed refers. Rasheed condemns the involvement of Laila's brothers declaring, “The same man your stupid brothers gave their lives to fight for, the same ones your mother prayed would oust the Soviets...they are nothing but dogs!” While Rasheed criticizes them for being “stupid,” Fariba, Laila's mother, had praised her sons for being “real men...heroes.”

It did not take long for the Mujahadeen to fracture, however; the various factions began to fight when the ineffective Tajik president, Burhanuddin Rabbani, refused to relinquish his rotating presidency. Despite the attempts of the Tajik commander to Ahmad Shah Massoud to placate the coalition, the Pashtun and Hazara groups rebelled, inciting civil war. Renegade general and warlords fought each other to maintain control over the territories in which they ruled. Tariq's family was Pashtun, and that motivated them to relocate to Pakistan. Rasheed referenced this conflict when recounting, “I told you what I have seen out there. Dostum and Hekmatyar's men are firing on Massoud and Rabbani forces from either side of the Kabul river. Regular people are being killed daily, by the dozen, unprovoked. Yesterday the hospital was shelled, they aren't letting emergency food vehicles into the city, it's a war zone out there and I am the only one protecting you from it.”

The fighting persisted for several years until one group established dominance - the Taliban. Rasheed announced when “[t]he Taliban have reached Kabul.” The Taliban enforced strict Islamic law. Laila expressed disbelief and dismay over the Taliban’s most significant changes, including prohibiting the education and employment of women. Rasheed retorted, “spoken like the arrogant daughter of a poetry reading university man that you are. How urbane, how Tajik, of you.” Rasheed, like Tariq, was a Pashtun while Laila and her family were Tajik. These were the two primary ethnic groups in the play. Since the Pashtuns represented more of the Afghanistan population, they were associated with more prosperity and opportunities. These opportunities were no longer afforded to women, however, as reflected in the play when Laila has to have a caesarean during the birth of Zalmai without anesthesia or antibiotics. As Mariam astutely observed, “the country ha[d] declared war on women.”

Here is a link to a historical timeline of Afghanistan which will be helpful in following and understanding the events of the play:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/asia-jan-june11-timeline-afghanistan>

The Aftermath of 9/11

By 1997, the Taliban maintained control over 95% of Afghanistan. They aided Osama Bin Laden, the leader of the extremist group Al-Qaeda, by providing him protection in exchange for financial aid. On September 11, 2001, nineteen individuals associated with the terrorist group hijacked four commercial airplanes, crashing them into the two twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon right outside Washington, D.C., and a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States declared war on Afghanistan, as their demands that the Taliban give up Bin Laden had been ignored. In December of that year, through the American-led invasion in Afghanistan, the Taliban was overthrown. After the fall of the Taliban, Laila and Tariq return to Afghanistan, making a stop in the village in which Mariam was raised to pay a tribute to the woman who gave them freedom.

TERMS TO KNOW

(in alphabetical order)

Compiled by Jenna Turk, Artistic Associate, Theatre Calgary

The official languages of Afghanistan are Dari and Pashto. Dari, the Afghan dialect of Farsi or Persian, is the first language of about half of the population and the second language of many more. Pashto, the native language of the Pashtun people, is the first language of around 40% of Afghans and 15% of Pakistanis. Both Dari and Pashto are part of the Indo-European language family and are written in Arabic script – but the two languages are not mutually intelligible. Since Afghanistan is an Islamic country, speakers of both languages also use Arabic words and phrases in their daily speech.

Afghani: The official currency of Afghanistan.

Allah's will: God's will.

Azan: The Islamic call to prayer.

Babaloo Prayers: Family prayers traditionally spoken by the head of the household.

Baby Musa: This refers to Prophet Musa (Moses) whose mother is said to have sent him down the Nile as an infant to save him from danger. The river carried him to the Egyptian Pharaoh's lands where he was saved.

Biwa: A widow.

Burqa: An enveloping outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions to cover themselves in public.

Caesarian: An alternative method to giving birth vaginally that involves cutting through the walls of the abdomen and uterus for delivery.

Dehati: A villager from somewhere rural.

Dostum: Refers to Abdul Rashid Dostum who was a general in the Afghan army during the Soviet War and was an independent warlord and leader fighting the Taliban. In 2013 he apologized for his role in the civil war.

Dozd: Thief.

Halwa: Generally considered a dessert, but can either be flour-based (usually more gelatinous) or nut-butter-based (often crumbly).

Hamshira: Sister; this term may also be used formally when addressing strangers.

Harami: A derogatory term for someone born out of wedlock; a child with no father.

Hashish: A recreational drug that is part of the cannabis family. Afghanistan is the leading producer of it in the world.

Hekmatyar: Refers to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar a politician and warlord who was the Prime Minister of Afghanistan from 1993-1994 and then again in 1996. He is known to many as the “Butcher of Kabul.”

Herat: The third-largest city in Afghanistan situated in the valley of the Hari River.

Jan: Dear.

Kabul: The capital of Afghanistan and its largest city, located in the east.

Khala: Aunt.

Khastegar: A suitor.

Kolba: A small shack or hut; a crude shelter.

Koran: The central religious text of Islam which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God.

Lahore: Located in Pakistan near the border of India, it is the capital of the province of Punjab.

Malika: Queen.

Massoud: Refers to Abdul Shah Massoud a political and military leader. He fought the Taliban as the head of the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, but was assassinated by a suicide bomber just days before 9/11.

Mujahideen: Guerrilla military outlets; Muslim-Afghan warriors.

Mullah: An educated Muslim trained in religious law and doctrine.

Namaz Prayers: Prayers of Islam performed 5 times daily.

Noor: A nickname meaning “light.”

Pashtun: The largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

Peshawar: Located in Pakistan near the border of Afghanistan, it is the capital of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Pir Penjal: A mountain range in the Inner Himalayan region.

Rabbani: Refers to Burhanuddin Rabbani who was the President of the Islamic State of Afghanistan from 1992 to 1996 and fought against the Taliban. He was killed in his home by a suicide bomber in 2011.

Sabzi: An Iranian herb stew.

Soviets: Members of the Soviet Union's army who invaded Afghanistan and assumed communist control from 1979-1989.

Tajik: Refers to people from Tajikistan, but Rasheed uses it pejoratively, as an insult. He insinuates Laila is privileged, as the Tajiks are known to be settled land owners.

Volga & Benz: The Volga is a brand of automobile that originated in the Soviet Union. It represents communism and functionality; they were often used as taxi cabs. The Benz refers to the automobile manufacturer Mercedes-Benz whose products are globally known as symbols of style and luxury.

Watan: Land or country.

Zahmat: Trouble.

MOVIE NIGHT

By Jenna Turk, Artistic Associate, Theatre Calgary

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a story of remarkable resilience and the female bond. Set in war-torn Afghanistan, based on the bestselling novel by Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a brand-new theatrical adaptation that is rich in its inspiration. Explore its themes with these notable films:

Beneath the Veil A 2001 episode of *Dispatches*, a British TV current affairs documentary series, which exposes the inhuman judicial practices of the Taliban through the story of one woman's trial. It won a Royal Television Society Television Journalism Award for Programme of the Year in 2001.

Kandahar A partly fictional and partly true 2001 Iranian film that follows an Afghan-Canadian woman's journey as she returns to Afghanistan after hearing that her oldest friend plans to take her own life.

Osama The first film to be shot entirely in Afghanistan since 1996 when the Taliban banned the creation of all new films; this 2003 film tells the story of an adolescent girl who disguises herself as a boy in order to support her family in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

The Kite Runner A 2007 drama based on Khaled Hosseini's best-selling novel of the same name. Set largely in Kabul, this story focusses on male friendship and follows a pair of boys divided by class as they grow up in violent Afghanistan.

He Named Me Malala A 2015 documentary about Pakistani female activist and Nobel Prize winner, Malala Yousafzai, and her recovery from an assassination-attempt by the Taliban on her life due to her fervent support of girls' rights to education.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Compiled by Sarah Farrant

Drama (Senior Years)	Creating (CR): The learner generates, develops, and communicates ideas for creating drama/theatre.	DR-1: The learner generates ideas from a variety of sources for creating drama/theatre.
	Connecting (C): The learner develops understanding about the significance of the dramatic arts by making connections to various times, places, social groups, and cultures.	DR-C1: The learner develops understandings about people and practices in the dramatic arts.
		DR-C2: The learner develops understanding about the influence and impact of the dramatic arts.
	Responding (R): The learner uses critical reflection to inform drama/theatre learning and to develop agency and identity.	DR-R1: The learner generates initial reactions to drama/theatre experiences.
		DR-R2: The learner critically observes and describes drama/theatre experiences.
		DR-RW: The learner analyzes and interprets drama/theatre experiences.
DR-R4: The learner applies new understandings about drama/theatre to construct identity and to act in transformative ways.		

English Language Arts	Explore Thoughts, Ideas, Feelings, and Experiences	1.1.1: Express Ideas- Question and reflect on personal responses, predictions, and
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		interpretations; apply personal viewpoints to diverse situations or circumstances.
Comprehend and Respond Personally and Critically to Oral, Print, and Other Media Texts	2.1.1: Prior Knowledge-	Analyze and explain connections between previous experiences, prior knowledge, and a variety of texts.
	2.2.1: Experience Various Texts-	Experience texts from a variety of forms and genres and cultural traditions; explain various interpretations of the same text.
	2.2.2: Connects Self, Texts, and Culture-	Examine how personal experiences, community traditions, and Canadian perspectives are presented in oral, literary, and media texts.
	2.2.3: Appreciate the Artistry of Texts-	Discuss how word choice and supporting details in oral, literary, and media texts [including books, drama, and oral presentations] affect purpose and audience.
Experiment with Language	2.3.4: Examine creative uses of language in popular culture, recognize how figurative language and techniques create a	

		dominant interpretation, mood, tone, and style.
	Manage Ideas and Information	3.2.5: Make Sense of Information- Identify a variety of factors that affect meaning; scan to locate specific information quickly; summarize, report, and record main ideas of extended oral, visual, and written texts.
	Celebrate and Build Community	5.2.2: Relate Texts to Culture- Explain ways in which oral, literary, and media texts relate topics and themes in life.
		5.2.3: Appreciate Diversity- Reflect on ways in which the choices and motives of individuals encountered in oral, literary, and media texts provide insight into those of self and others; discuss personal participation and responsibilities in a variety of communities.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

By Sarah Farrant

Thinking About the Play

The following questions can be used for class discussion, responses, or, in some cases, essay topics:

1. Why do you think *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was adapted into a stage play by Ursula Rani Sarma rather than the original author, Khaled Hosseini?
2. There are 19 characters. How can the play be done with a cast of 8 adults and 2 children? What are advantages and disadvantages to that?
3. Could this play be staged with gender blind casting?
4. What surprised you about the play?
5. Do you think this play would be easy to produce? Why or why not?
6. What do you think is the intended message of the show? What did you take away from the show?
7. How was the explosion staged? Was it effective?
8. Why did the playwright include memories?
9. Why did Tariq declare, "if I ever do get married they will have to make room for three on the wedding stage. Me, the bride, and the guy holding a gun to my head?" Do you think he meant it?
10. At the end of scene 2, why does Mariam following a cycle of chores illustrate the passage of time?
11. Why did Rasheed hire Abdul Sharif?
12. What secrets did Laila and Rasheed keep from each other?
13. What are the reasons Rasheed wanted to take Laila on as a second wife?
14. Why did Laila consent to be Rasheed's wife?
15. What in Mariam's past influenced her behaviours and beliefs?
16. Do you think Mariam is justified in resenting Laila?
17. What do you suspect happened to Mariam's wooden spoon?
18. Why does Mariam change her perspective on Laila?
19. Do you think Laila is a good mother?
20. What are five examples of kindness and five examples of cruelty in the play?
 - Expansion activity: Explore and reflect on the complexity of characters. Pick one character and give three examples of them being cruel and three examples of them being kind.
21. Why does Rasheed make Mariam accountable for Laila?

22. What are the differences between Mariam and Laila's upbringing?
23. Why did Mariam blame herself for her mother's suicide? Can someone be blamed for someone else's suicide?
24. Rasheed says, "I guess some people can't be dead enough." What does he mean?
25. Why do you think Wakil betrayed Laila at the train station?
26. Why did they hope for Laila's second baby to be a boy?
27. Is the Interrogator truly concerned about protecting Laila as he claims?
28. In what ways is their society similar to ours? In what ways is it different?
29. How do the living conditions change throughout the play?
30. Why do you think "the city has gone Titanic mad?"
31. Why does Rasheed treat Zalmai differently than Aziza?
32. Why do you think Aziza develops a stutter?
33. At the end of the play, what do you think Laila intends on naming the baby if it's a girl?
34. Do the rules in the society seem fair?
35. Why do you think the play begins and ends with the sound of the nightingale? Why do you think the epilogue starts with birdsong?
36. Do you believe in the philosophy, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"?
37. If someone wants Titanic products, why would they have to buy it on the black market?
38. What is the sun a symbol of? What does this suggest about the play?
39. Which character do you most strongly identify with or relate to in the play and why?
40. Why are there more rules for women than men under the Taliban?

Figurative Language

A **simile** makes a comparison between two unlike things, often introduced by "like" or "as." "As busy as a bee" and "stand out like a sore thumb" are commonly used similes. Explain the simile in any or all of these selections:

- **Fariba:** It was one thing when you were little kids running around but now things are different...and remember he is a boy so he doesn't care about reputation but you are a girl and a pretty one at that. Your reputation is a delicate thing. Like a mynah bird in your hands, loosen your grip and away it flies.

- **Nana:** Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always.
- **Young Mariam:** There, I saw him, at the window, I saw him...he's been there all night? He left me to sleep outside on the ground like a dog all night?

A **metaphor** makes a comparison between two things by stating that one thing is another thing. For example, the famous metaphor, "All the world's a stage" from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* compares the world to a stage. Explain the metaphor in any or all of these selections:

- **Rasheed:** What is this? Have I married a pair of statues?
- **Rasheed:** I'll say it this way, if she were a car she would be a Volga. But you... you on the other hand would be a Benz. A brand new first class shiny benz.
- **Tariq:** (*smiles*) I bet your mother's guests are talking about us now. They are saying that we are canoeing down the river of sin...
- **Laila:** (*giggles*) Riding the rickshaw of wickedness...
- **Mariam:** You may be the palace malika and me a dehtie, but I won't take orders from you. He can slit my throat but I won't do it, do you hear me? I won't be your servant.
- **Mariam:** Now kiss Aziza for me, tell her she is the noor of my eyes and the sultan of my heart. Will you do that for me?

**You can differentiate by assigning advanced students the last two quotes, as they include subject-specific terminology. You can further differentiate by providing them with the definitions (included in the Glossary) or requiring them to conduct research*

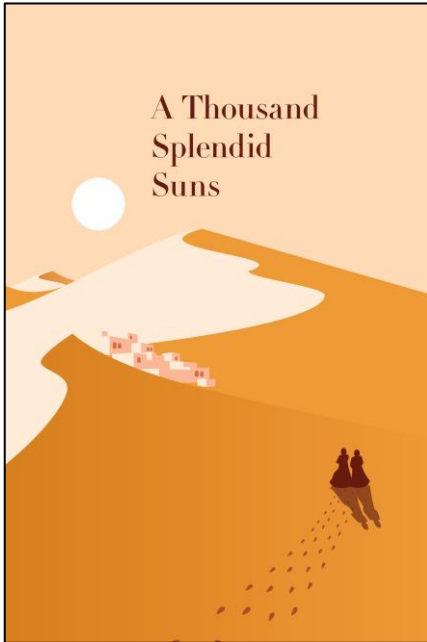
Irony is the contrast or incongruity between expectations of a situation and the reality, usually for humorous effect, though it can be darkly humorous. Explain the irony in one of these scenarios:

- **Rasheed:** Sometimes I want to leave that thing in a basket and let her float down Kabul River. Like baby Moosa.

Explain the *humour* in the scenes below:

- **Fariba:** When I met him my friends would say 'Hakim may not be the best for mending a fence, but if you have a book that needs urgent reading then he's your man.'

Poster



Prior to attending the play, show your students the poster. Ask them to identify the images in the poster and make predictions as to the plot of the play.

Audition Piece

Ask students to identify a selection of text in the script that would make the best audition slides for each of the following characters:

1. Laila
2. Mariam
3. Rasheed

Joke of the Day

Q: What goes around the world but stays in a corner?

A: A STAMP.

Desert Island Game

Babi: It's like that game...you're going to a desert island and you can only bring five books, which ones would you choose?

Play a version of this game with your students. Consider asking them:

- a) Choose five books they would take with them to the deserted island
- b) Choose one book they would take with them to the deserted island
- c) Choose items they would take with them to the deserted island

Oh So Relatable

Ask your students in what ways the following scene is relatable:

Fariba: (Fariba looks to her, touches her face) But at least I still have you eh? (Laila smiles and goes to move her face away but Fariba has seen something, turns her face back to hers, examines it) Laila...Are you plucking your eyebrows?

Laila: (self conscious) Just a little

Fariba: When did you become a young woman?

Laila: I don't know...it just happened I guess.

Financial Literacy

Laila hid a thousand Afghani in the lining of her dress. Ask the students to convert that into CAD and then determine how long they would be able to survive off of that amount of money.

How to Make Halwa

Show the following video in which an Afghani woman prepares halwa while speaking in Dari. The students must attentively watch what she does while reading the subtitles.

Then have the students practice procedural writing by composing the recipe including the ingredients, equipment, and directions. You could consider challenging by presenting them with an alternate recipe for Halwa and asking them to identify the differences. If possible, you could prepare Halwa in class to experience the culture's cuisine. Ask them if they recall what Laila says is "awfully good with" (tea).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNHKMeeoah0>

Poem Analysis

Babi believes there is always time for poetry, and reads Laila the following piece:

How beautiful is Kabul nestled beneath her barren mountains

Even the Rose is wanton for her silken thorns

Though the wind, heavy with her fine and powdered soil, stings by eyes

I love her, for knowledge and love are both born of this earth...

I sing to praise her glorious blooms

I blush in wonder at the beauty of her trees-

Every street of Kabul entices my eyes

Through the bazars I watch the caravans of Egypt pass by

I could not count the moons that shimmer on her roof

And the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls

Ask your students to identify and explain examples of figurative language (such as personification), and to explain the overall significance of this passage (including but not limited to the inspiration for the title).

Alternate Ending

Have your students write an alternate ending. This will prompt them to contemplate what other options the characters had in the final scenes of the play. Challenge them to consider deeply the rules of the society.

Extra, Extra!

Ask your students to write a news article depicting the events in Kabul. You could challenge them by asking them to write one article from the Taliban's perspective and one article from the Canadian perspective.

Dear Diary

Ask your students to write a diary from the perspective of Laila, Mariam, or Rasheed with a minimum of three entries written at three different points in the play. They need to convey the inner thoughts and feelings of the character as well as how they change.

Taliban Ruling

In the play, Aziza reads the following aloud from a flyer:

"Our watan is now known as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. These are the laws that we will enforce and you will obey: All citizens must pray five times a day, if it is prayer time and you are caught doing something else you will be beaten. All men will grow their beards. All boys will wear turbans. Singing is forbidden. Dancing is forbidden. Playing cards, chess, gambling, and kite flying are forbidden. Writing books, watching films, and painting pictures are forbidden. If you keep parakeets, you will be beaten and the birds killed. If you steal, your hand will be cut off at the wrist, if you steal again your foot will be cut off. Attention women: You will stay inside your homes at all times. If you go out you must be accompanied by a male relative. If you are caught alone you will be beaten and sent home. You will not, under any circumstance, show your face. You will cover your face with a burka when outside. Cosmetics are forbidden. Jewellery is forbidden. You will not wear charming clothes. You will not speak unless spoken to. You

will not make eye contact with men. You will not laugh in public. You will not paint your nails, if you do you will lose a finger. Girls are forbidden from attending school. All girls' schools are to be closed immediately. Women are forbidden from working. If you are found guilty of adultery, you will be stoned to death. Listen. Listen well.”

Consider asking your students rank the rules from most reasonable to least reasonable. You could also ask them to write an argumentative paragraph or essay on why one or more of these rules is or is not justified either here in Canada OR in Kabul at that time.

Book vs. Play

Read the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini upon which the play was based. Guide students in comparing and contrasting the two. You may want to provide them with a Venn diagram to structure their thinking. This could lead to a discussion and/or written composition. You may want to ask them: *Did you prefer the novel or the play and why? What changes needed to be made for the stage?*

10 Questions

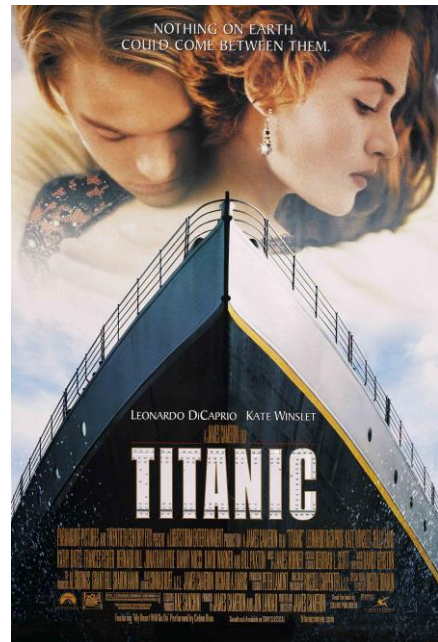
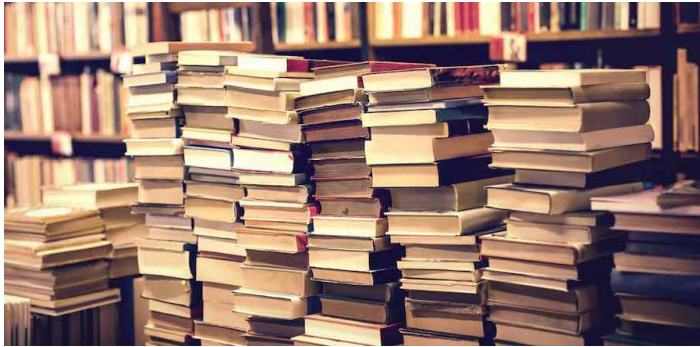


On Twitter, Ursula Rani Sarma shared John Yorke's 10 Questions for refining writing. Have your students write a character-driven story or script and consult these questions in the writing process:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/writersroom/writers-lab/10-questions>

Symbols

Have students pick one or more of the following symbols and explain its significance to the play.



Mixed Media Messages

Invite students to compile a collection of media (images, songs, etc.) that reflect the message(s) of the play.

Body Biography

In a Collabor8te Filmmaker Interview, Ursula Rani Sarma says, "I'm a very character-driven writer...my writing process has always been that I start first with a character." Have your students create a body biography for one of the characters in the play (which they can apply when constructing their own characters for a story later). A body biography is a visual portrait of a character through the use of images and words. The intention is not simply to illustrate what you imagine the character looks like physically, but to create a visual representation of the character as a whole being.

- A) **The Brain**- This should represent what the character thinks.
- B) **The Eyes**- This should represent how the character appears to others on the outside.
- C) **The Mouth**- This should represent what the character says.
- D) **The Heart**- This should represent what the character loves most.
- E) **The Arms**- These should represent the best and worst qualities of the character. The left arm should represent the virtues, and the right arm should represent the vices.
- F) **The Hands**- This should represent something the character seeks to control OR a significant item to the character.
- G) **The Spine**- This should represent what motivates the character the most.
- H) **The Stomach/ Gut**- This should represent how other characters react to the character.
- I) **The Legs**- The left leg should represent the character's actions at the beginning of the novel and the right leg should represent their actions at the end of the novel.
- J) **The Feet**-This should represent the character's fundamental or foundational beliefs.

Making Connections

When asked, in a Cork Independent Interview, who has had the biggest influence on her life, Sarma replied, “my mother and her incredibly positive outlook on life, and her endurance.” Discuss this statement in light of the following scene:

Nana: What would be the point? It would be like shining a spittoon, there is only one skill women like us need, Mariam, and they don’t teach it in schools.

Mullah: You should not speak to the girl like that, my child.

Nana: With all due respect, you should know better than to encourage these foolish ideas of hers. There is nothing out there for her. Nothing but rejection and heartache. I know, akhund sahib, I know. (beat) Look at me Mariam. Only one skill you need, and it’s this: tahamul. Endure.

Young Mariam: Endure what Nana?

Nana: Oh don’t you fret about that, there won’t be any shortage of things.

One Sentence

In an interview with *The Irish Times*, Sarma said, “I’m fascinated by how much can be delivered in a single sentence. You can end someone’s world or make someone’s day in a sentence.” Have your students write down what they believe is the most powerful sentence and/or have them write and then deliver a sentence that will make someone’s day as part of a kindness project.

Article Analysis

Read the following two articles published about Sarma by *The Irish Times*. Explain, based upon what you learn about her and her life, why she would connect with this story.

- <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/stealing-from-other-worlds-1.381063>
- <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/back-to-her-roots-via-the-magic-tree-1.941944>

Girl Power

Facilitate a discussion on the human rights abuses women in Afghanistan continue to endure. To do so, you may want to ask:

Hosseini says the book is a reflection of “the collective spirit” of Afghan women. What does that say about the rights of women in the country?

You could then consult external sources such as the Gender Inequality Index, which indicates that the literacy rate for women is one of the lowest globally. This could easily lend itself to a lesson on the privilege of and power that comes from education.

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/AFG>

On Theme

In an interview with Riverhead Books, Khaleed Hosseini identifies the themes of the story as friendship, commitment, self-sacrifice, family, and longing for acceptance and belonging. Choose one of these themes and discuss its relevance and significance to the play.

Picture It

Have students draw or describe how they envision Afghanistan. After that, have them compare that with the poetry Babi reads and this article:

*How beautiful is Kabul nestled beneath her barren mountains
Even the Rose is wanton for her silken thorns
Though the wind, heavy with her fine and powdered soil, stings by eyes
I love her, for knowledge and love are both born of this earth...*

*I sing to praise her glorious blooms
I blush in wonder at the beauty of her trees-*

<https://www.businessinsider.com/afghanistan-is-beautiful-photos-2017-12#-to-haunting-desert-highlands--5>

Unsticking Stigmas

Facilitate a lesson on the stigmatization people from Afghanistan (both in the country and in other places in the world) following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The aim is for students to understand that stigmas are negative stereotypes that can adversely affect lives, and that this group of people has been subjected to this.

You may want to consider some or the entire “Understanding Stereotypes” lesson created by Discovery Education Canada:

<https://www.discoveryeducation.ca/teachers/free-lesson-plans/understanding-stereotypes.cfm>

You may also want to consider having students read the short story “My Name is Osama” by Sharifa Alkhateeb and Steven S. Lapham, and answer the follow-up questions:

<https://www.cambriansd.org/cms/lib07/CA01902282/Centricity/Domain/316/My-Name-is-Osama0001.pdf>

https://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/TM/WS_lp277-05.shtml

RESOURCES

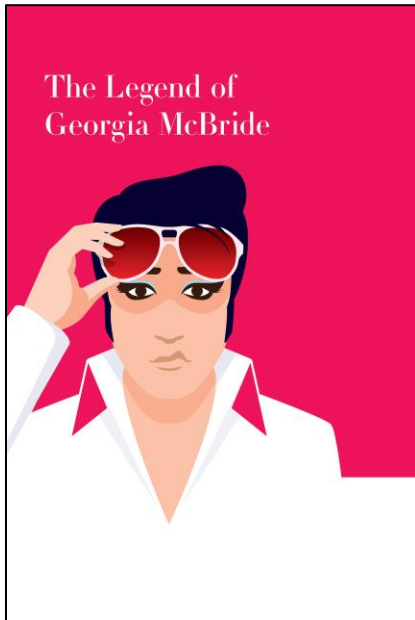
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- https://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/TM/WS_lp277-05.shtml
- <https://www.discoveryeducation.ca/teachers/free-lesson-plans/understanding-stereotypes.cfm>

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XJj1DSgwBE>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4kyaITT_wY
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQcNeLBobzc>
- <https://khaledhosseini.com/bio/>
- <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/AFG>

Images:

- <https://khaledhosseini.com/bio/>
- <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-ca-cm-thousand-splendid-suns-20170122-htmlstory.html>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2010/mar/21/debate-on-french-burka-ban>
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Arrive Early: Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. Please ensure you arrive with enough time to find your seat before the performance starts.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please **TURN OFF** your cell phones/iPods/gaming systems/cameras. We have seen an increase in texting, surfing, and gaming during performances, which is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. The use of cameras and recording devices is strictly prohibited.

Talking During the Performance: You can be heard (even when whispering) by the actors onstage and the audience around you. Disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait to share your thoughts and opinions with others until after the performance.

Food/Drinks: Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. Where there is an intermission, concessions may be open for purchase of snacks and drinks. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

Dress: There is no dress code at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, but we respectfully request that patrons refrain from wearing hats in the theatre. We also strive to be a scent-free environment, and thank all patrons for their cooperation.

Leaving During the Performance: If an audience member leaves the theatre during a performance, they will be readmitted at the discretion of our Front of House staff. Should they be readmitted, they will not be ushered back to their original seat, but placed in a vacant seat at the back of the auditorium.

Being Asked to Leave: The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave the performance if that person is being disruptive. Inappropriate and disruptive behaviour includes, but is not limited to: talking, using electronic devices, cameras, laser pointers, or other light- or sound-emitting devices, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Talkbacks: All Tuesday evening performances, student matinees and final matinees at Royal MTC feature a talkback with members of the cast following the show. While watching the performance, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors. Questions can be about the story, the interpretation, life in the theatre, etc.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, applaud, cheer and respond to the performance appropriately. Make sure to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause during the curtain call.